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RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK
BY ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD

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GOING TO THE SPRING — RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK

GOING TO THE SPRING

IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the right. 9 inches high, 5½ inches wide.

RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK

BY

ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD

NEW YORK

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Going to the Spring . . . . . Frontispiece
The Ghost Dance . . . . Page 16
Indian Encampment . . . . . . " 16
Pegasus . . . . " 24
Indian Camp . . . . " 24
Moonlight . . . . " 26
At Nature's Mirror . . . . . . " 30
The Captive . . . . " 30
The Brook by Moonlight . . . . . " 33
Moonlight . . . . " 36

RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK

RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK

PART ONE

T IS often the fate of a man to be misunderstood in his own generation, even to be ignored, and if his pursuit in life be Art this is particularly the case, because it is the few who find deep enough interest in the matter to devote time and study to acquiring knowledge. It is far easier to accept the fashion of the hour, and, since our walls demand pictures for their decoration, obviously it is best to secure those which are the fashion. The fate of such a man is not a hard one essentially, although it may mean privation. There is an implied compliment in the negligence, a suggestion that he is not understood, and so, quite unconsciously, the public places him upon a height. This is a comforting sort of reasoning, but does not mean to say that the condition is a right one. A man who is in earnest—deadly earnest—that kind of earnestness which is willing to endure sacrifice, that man knows that he labors for a small audience. His appeal is to the cultivated few, and rarely, I think, does a man live and work well in a complete and solitary silence. Somebody knows, and somebody cares for his work, perhaps understands it, and this is the great reward,—to be understood.

The province of the artist being to express the beautiful,—a phrase that from oft repetition becomes rather a platitude, though it should be an axiom,—he is in some sort a messenger, and there can be no need of a messenger if there is no message. If, then, he tries to deliver his message of beauty, sad indeed is his lot if he can not win at least an audience of one.

A great value in a work of art is that we may read the man in his work,—nay, more,—we may read the man and his time, and art which is immortal renders a people immortal.

Fashion, tendency of the time, schools of art, the dealers, are influences behind most of what passes current as the art of the day, but somewhere in a garret, maybe, a solitary man, working in his own way, oblivious to the schools or the clamor of fashion, creates work which surely finds the light and arouses the highest and noblest emotions.

In our own land it is curious how many of the greatest painters are without the tradition of School. Self-taught we say in the catalogues. The reason is not to be found by inveighing against schools, which are very useful, very needful indeed to the ordinary sort of student, but it is rather because men of genius need no rule, their foundations are built within their own souls, and the convictions of such sanctuary inevitably beget great works.

Therefore to stand alone, free, independent, is almost a necessity for great result.

I have heard men say, "I must make my work

more like the things other men are doing." There is nothing more deadly, nor more indicative of mediocrity, nothing which more stultifies the mind or more surely points with unerring finger to the commonplace. It is insincere, and when that is said, the final breath of hope is gone, for no good art can exist without sincerity.

There are those who argue that a man may follow a leader with great sincerity. The answer is, in art each man must be a leader, not a follower, for no two men are alike, no two souls are given the same message, and while it may amuse the critic to trace likeness, the great truth remains that true art is personal.

Long hair does not make personality, nor would the wearing of green trousers. Eccentricity is the vanity of feeble talent. The thing has been hinted at,—it is the aspiration of the soul.

If Ingres' line had no other quality than its exactness it could not have been, as it is, great art. If our admiration for Franz Hals stops or begins at his brush-work we have not seen the true Hals. I know, quite well, in saying this I shall be contradicted, for to the majority Hals is marvelous because, and only because he had the most dexterous touch the world has seen; but he had something more, and the keenness and precision of his observation, his complete grasp of the entity of his portrait, these were quite as marvelous as his brush. Dexterity is not enough. We look and gasp even, we marvel and admire, but we see with our eyes only, and are not

lured in the spirit. The way, the manner, is not the fine thing in a noble work, though it may, for the moment, charm. What has been said to me in this picture?—how much finer is the observation than my own? Can I love the report here set down always? Is the mind of the observer ennobled? Such things give value.

A work of art should express some profound love or belief in the heart of the artist—belief in the harmony, in the design, in the effect, as well as in the meaning, else it is merely a work of craft,—handicraft, —and to be valued as such.

This does not exclude those things which are attempts to render impressions received from nature, however passing, because beautiful impressions are the creators in us of our intensest loves.

When I am in the presence of work which tells me any or all of these things, I know that an artist has spoken.

It is with some such thought that I contemplate the work of Ralph Albert Blakelock.

PART TWO

MR. BLAKELOCK was born in New York, on Greenwich Street, I think, in 1847. His father, an Englishman by birth, was a Homeopathic physician. There is little record of the boy's earlier years, no evidence that much time was given to education, and always he seems to have had the love of painting

and a passionate love of music. Whether these gifts descended to him from some ancestral source, we do not know, or whether, as in so many distinguished cases, his gifts came to him directly; in any event he heeded the call of art and very early in life began to paint. His desires did not lead him to enter any art school, or seek the guidance of any special master.

He began to teach himself by the laborious but most valuable method of close study from nature. Very painful are those early ventures, for some of them still exist, and wholly devoid of any suggestion of the knowledge of craft. One may imagine him doing precisely what other boys have done—trying with small brushes to reproduce every little thing before the eyes. How tiny are the touches, how feeble the grasp of form in its largeness of character, and yet there is so much of faithful devotion to his task, that we know both hand and brain were gaining in power and understanding. We may believe, however, that at the outset he was not equipped with great powers of observation. To the unfolding, expanding mind, there is no teacher of so great worth as observation—not merely the ability to see acutely or fully, but that rarer phase in which selection is the significant thing. To be able to see fully and select finely those qualities or parts which best indicate character—that is observation,—artistic observation,—and later by its use will come the gift which is the hardest to obtain, and the last to come in the development of an artist,—the ability to omit. This brings synthesis, the utmost remove,

probably, from reality, but the realm in which the noblest creations of art may be found. It does not come early in life. It is won by travail and strain, even suffering, and the synthesist of fifty is usually the literalist at sixteen.

With Blakelock his training was slow and achieved under great handicap. Revelation did not come until later. He never went abroad, although he was an intense lover, we are told, of the old masters. Just what that means it is difficult to say, because at the time we had, in America, little which was of value from the great painters of long ago. The museums were much cluttered with trash, since removed, and the great wave of importation, inaugurated by dealers and collectors which has brought to us many of the precious canvases of the world, had not begun. We must believe, then, that his love was based on photographic reproduction, which is admirable ground for study, but one is forced to consider form alone in these works since color is denied, or at best only suggested.

Later we are to say that Mr. Blakelock was a devotee of color, one to whom color was pure music. Whence, then, did his inspiration come? The answer is not easy.

Probably when he made his first journey to the West and began to study the Indians,—when the barbaric depth of their color, the richness and plenitude of reds and yellows, the strength of shadow and brilliancy of light awakened his vision and set tingling those pulses of the brain which control the color

emotions. His own soul an untamed one, responding to no conventional law, these children of forest and plain appealed to his deepest instincts. Until the end of his career, they ever and again recur in his compositions. Never, I think, did he attempt portraiture —Indian portraiture—but the nomadic life, the incidents of daily routine, the building of canoes, or pitching of encampments, the dances, these were his themes and his love for them never cooled or grew less. We have no drawings or group of studies in which to trace his processes. Whether or not he made direct studies from life, or by intense concentration secured his information, does not matter here. We have the results and through them we know his temperament.

He was always an experimentalist. Who is not when seeking to improve? But with him experiment led into many fields, and chance was not scorned if he could gain from her whims. It was not unusual with him when some interesting mingling of color chanced upon his palette, to develop it there into whatever theme was suggested, and cut out the chosen piece of wood as expressive of artistic value. We find many of these little panels, unimportant so far as subject is concerned, but very beautiful in quality both of color and of surface.

These two words, quality and surface, come quickly to mind when critically examining a Blakelock, even an unimportant one. These merits do not seem to be secured by a trick, as so often is said, yet no

doubt the purely experimental ones may seem so; but taking them for what they are, experiments in the procedure of development, and then turning to the nobler canvases of the man,—the ideas of trick, of sham, of chance, pass speedily away and we see the work of a man who, seeing and feeling artistically, tried to express himself in a technique fitted to his desires. He would have had little patience with the man who says the only honest painting is that which takes the mixed tint from the palette and applies it to the canvas with as glib a touch as may be, moulding and modeling his bit of form in its light and atmosphere as deftly as possible, and frankly avows all else to be bad art.

Such men doubtless exist, but they know nothing of the subtleties of color, the influence of one tone vibrating through another, the increased luster of tone upon tone, and the magic carrying power of certain colors for certain others—nor do they know the beauty of surface,—surface merely,—when the paint has been so applied that future workings find a tooth, a mat to hold the tint making it resonant, deep, lusterful, glowing even into the depths of shadowed blacks. These things Mr. Blakelock knew and practiced with the love of a musician for his tone.

Literary questions, story telling, moral meanings, nor history were in his ideals of art. With his love for the Indian he might have essayed profound lessons for the renascence of the race, a recrudescence of their primitive privileges, and failed in his art. Rather he

sought in their lives and habits the beauty which would lend itself to the art of painting,—the rhythmic sway of figures in the dance seen dimly under the shadowy trees, the silent tepee with the lingering light concentrated upon it—the barbaric mingling of colorful groups in contrast with deep woodland shadows. It was enough for him to search out the beauty of these. He probably would not have liked that rare and dignified Indian picture of Mr. George de Forest Brush, "The Sculptor and the King," with its reminder of a romantic page in an almost forgotten history. He, doubtless, would have found fault with the severe intellectuality of the treatment, and this reason traced further merely means that the theme was not treated by Mr. Brush subjectively.

Blakelock always expressed himself subjectively, and, in his ripened art, with complete success. This is one of the precious qualities in the work he has given us.

PART THREE

DURING all his life, probably, Mr. Blakelock was harassed by the need of money. Very probably, also, he was not provident with that which came into his hands, and being careless in his expenditures he was constantly in need.

It is an oft urged dictum that an artist is better off without money, his art should be all in all to him,—but our modern life imposes obligations in the mere

business of keeping alive, which keeps this thought very prominently in mind, and no argument is needed in suggesting the value to any mind-worker of a mind at peace. This is one of the pitiful things in this man's career,—that his advance toward that brilliancy which would have rewarded him and finally did honor his time, was so greatly impeded, if not measurably reduced, and the man himself broken upon the wheel of suffering. Of the shadowed mind which closed forever his labors, certainly the story is sad enough.

Mr. Blakelock was married and had a large family. He had known his wife since childhood. She is still living, the family much scattered, and every picture and study has been disposed of to stay the smart of need. Mrs. Blakelock knows the burden of hard work, and the wolf has often looked in her door, but she is a brave and patient woman!

There are countries which do not allow such things to be,—countries that we consider far behind our own in civilization which recognize the permanent value of art and see to it that suffering shall not stay a gifted hand.

Mrs. Blakelock talks gently and quietly of her husband. She tells many little stories which show his extreme devotion to his art—its dominance in every moment of life. She tells of his habit of seeing pictures, compositions, in everything,—the markings on old boards; the broken or worn enamel in the bath-tub being a field of great suggestiveness. Painters

THE GHOST DANCE

COLLECTION OF J. G. SNYDACKER

Canvas. Signed at the right. 21 inches high, 39 inches wide.

INDIAN ENCAMPMENT

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

HEARN COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the left. 37 inches high, 40 inches wide.

THE GHOST DANCE

COLLECTION OF J. G. SNYDACKER

Canvas. Signed at the right. 21 inches high, 39 inches wide

INDIAN ENCAMPMENT

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

HEARN COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the left. 27 inches high. 46 inches wide

will have no difficulty in understanding this—just how the shadows and lights will twinkle or break up—how the glow in the exposed copper will suggest sunset sky, and the shining higher note become the gleam of light on water. Such things are frequent and very interesting in an artist's experience.

In his years of work Blakelock had evolved a style, a style so specific that it might be said his pictures are all alike. This is not true except in so far as his method makes them alike. There were times when in the search for great darkness he used bitumen to the detriment of his work. It is a trying, though very seductive color, and has proved an enemy to many a painter's works. It never really dries, and under certain conditions of heat it becomes moist and gummy, —worse,—it runs. There is a very amusing though sufficiently tragic story about two pictures of Blakelock's. A gentleman, who owned some nine of his works, came to me one day and said, "You remember my Blakelocks?" "Yes," I said. "Well, I found two of them on the floor this morning." "You should have used stronger wire," I told him. "Wire nothing," he flared back, "The frames are hanging on the wall all right, but the pictures just slipped off the canvas, and were lying on the floor in a mass of brown gum."

The truth was, probably, that the weather had been very hot and the bituminous color melted away from the panel and slipped off to the floor. Such a thing would never happen again, and no one need

feel anxious. Blakelock gave up the use of bitumen and secured his darks in a wiser manner and with better colors.

It is a curious truth that a great workman pursues his craft under the very eye of those who love him and wonder at his abilities, that he will often have friends who become intensely interested in his methods, and watch daily feats of craftsmanship which are almost magical in their results, and achieved by processes, principles and laws which the workman has perfected for himself, eliminating all element of haphazard or chance, and which from repetition become almost a sort of portrait of himself,—and yet no one sits down and reports this man's speech; no one tells us specifically of that process which brings about the beauty and which, if told, would be immensely interesting to the general public.

That Blakelock suffers this fate is matter for real regret, and he has never written a word about his work, himself, or his craft. We can discover much, and if one is used to kindred processes it is not difficult to tell the manner of his procedure. The effect of thin paint in itself was not satisfying to him. He needed a firm, hard, *impasto* ground. This was doubtless achieved by staining in the form he wished,—always a tentative and slight theme—and about this he wrought a thick, rich, opaque body of silvery tone. He used most frequently Winsor and Newton colors and dilute varnish, (copal) as a medium.

At one time he experimented in making varnishes,

and many painters will remember the "Blakelock Varnish" which was on sale. This was probably no more than a good copal with a few drops of cold pressed linseed oil added.

When the silvery ground of his picture was hard and dry, he floated upon it more forms, using thin paints much richer in quality of color; when partly dry these were flattened with a palette knife, the forms brought into relief by subtle wipings, and once more allowed to dry. This process was repeated frequently, and when the surface became gummy or over glazed, he reduced it by grinding with pumice stone. The effect of this would bring the under silver of his first *impasto* into view, and with this for his key of gray he developed his theme, drawing with the darker and relieving with the under paint.

So bald a statement as this refers only to procedure, and has nothing whatever to do with the genius which guided the hand in each touch, nor with the taste or sense of color which controlled every move. It is offered to those who wish to know how Blakelock got his effect. By him it was very beautiful; by another it might be foolishness.

It was the custom of old Turner, the great English painter, to allow no one in the studio while he worked, nor to see him make his outdoor sketches. We can not believe it was timidity with him, or a modest doubt about his ability to do the thing well. That he objected to any one's finding out his methods is the more likely reason, and we miss very much the hints

which would have given us a clue to the wonder of his color and textile accomplishments.

In Blakelock the problem is easier for any one who has acquaintance with technical methods, or the mysteries of the palette.

The accusation against Blakelock that his canvases blacken with time is hardly fair and seldom true, except in the cases noted,—and if I am correct in the description of procedure, it is a simple matter if a canvas is suspected of darkening, to expose it to direct sunlight, which wonderfully freshens and clarifies the color. I doubt if the artist himself ever failed to do this, and it is a much easier thing to do than to subject a subtle work to the untender hands of a restorer, who, to brighten a work, removes entirely the last exquisite modulations of the artist.

PART FOUR

HOW long he was in reaching the power to express himself completely, to produce those distinguished works which we know to be his, is a matter of little moment, at best a question of opinion. What really concerns us is that against all the hard conditions which surrounded him and beset his years, he continued to work and to hold faithfully all the canons of his artistic faith. Also, he succeeded and the light of his genius found true expression.

To say of a picture, it is like a Blakelock, is high praise and suggests color, quality, tone and complete

unity. That his style was formed upon his own convictions is evident. He could not have known Isabey, nor Monticelli, both of whom might have influenced him. Knowledge of the Barbizon men was probably slight, and of little influence upon his mind.

Here, then, we have a man whose work is like none of his great contemporaries.

Inness, Wyant, Homer Martin, he must have known well, but there is no trace, to me, of their influence in his work.

I should think he might have loved Albert Ryder intensely. At times the quality of light is very similar in their work.

I remember a picture Ryder once showed me in his studio—this studio was merely a back room in an ordinary house and the sun shone brightly in the window. The picture was a moonlight, and I complained that the sunlight fell full upon the canvas. Ryder moved it into a corner, and the canvas shone and gleamed with the rare beauty of pure light. To my exclamations of wonder Ryder gently said, "That is what I call its magical quality!"—It is just this magic that makes the kinship with Blakelock.

It has been said that to be truly great, a man's art must found a school, it must be of such compelling power that it will have a following, and everywhere we should see reflections of the artist's genius. If this be so then Blakelock is not a great man. No school came into being, no group of men, believing and understanding his ideas, carries on his work. Of imita-

tors there are many,—men who think it is easy to make a canvas look like a Blakelock, and they hurry to do it because of late the works of Blakelock are in demand, but these paltry things are mere gummy masses rubbed together and left glaze upon glaze to disgust one who understands what Blakelock did in his fine things. The impression is very false that he secured his effects by heavy, superimposed glazes. That he knew the use and value of a glaze as few men now do is true, but many very beautiful examples of his work exist in which the quality seems to have been secured at the outset, and, because of that very precious thing, left alone. Bring together a large number of his pictures, and his range at once becomes apparent. Not only range of technical method, but of idea and theme. That he should enjoy the very manipulation of paint itself in his search for effect is only to say what all colorists enjoy. There is something amounting to an insanity in the emotions aroused when color is behaving,—when it is obedient to the guiding will of the painter, and resolving itself into glow, jewels, atmosphere, light, or velvet shadow.

All painters are not endowed with such sensitive emotions, and perhaps will not concur with me. Blakelock was so endowed to a high degree. I know a painter who has a fair measure of success, and yet he said, "I dislike the whole business of painting, and I know when I begin the paint will not behave." From such a man we would not expect fine color.

Monticelli makes a different statement,—"I know

no higher emotion than the laying on of a fine tone of black or sumptuous yellow!" To him the very paint was a medium of joy, and he offers to us those sensations of color, considering that message enough. At times it is so with Blakelock and he will stop midway, it would seem, in the completion of his canvas, because the musical chord of color was reached.

There was a little picture in the recently sold collection of Mr. Evans, entitled "Pegasus," in which the statement is very slight, the tones exquisite in the rhythmic flow, though there is very little of the richness of color found in very many of his pictures, yet it has a quality of gray that is masterly and most lovely. The forms are scarcely more than promised, but an added emphasis or touch would spoil it. The title "Pegasus" is probably amiss and not his. Doubtless the little figure was to be an Indian brave upon a white horse, but something in the beauty,—rare indeed—of the tones stayed his hand, and the thing remains incomplete but very beautiful and very artistic.

Mr. Charles W. Snow tells me an entirely different story. He bought the picture from Mr. Blakelock, who called it, "The Lady Godiva"—why, no one can say, since there is no town, no street, (surely no lady rides here)—merely a bit of rocky woodland. His further story is more interesting. Upon buying the picture Mr. Snow gave it to his wife. A dealer became much interested in it and tried to buy it from Mrs. Snow, but she refused to part with it. Finally the dealer came to her, and laying the canvas down on the

table he carefully placed gold pieces, two-dollar and a half gold pieces, all around the picture. "Now," said he, "will you keep the picture or its gold frame?" The presence of the gold was too great a lure, and she parted with the picture.

Another instance of titles to which I take exception is a picture in the possession of a distinguished collector of Chicago. It has been called, "The Ghost Dance," merely, it would seem, because of the indefinite, shadowy character of the group of faintly indicated figures moving into the picture from the right.

This is one of the very noblest of the artist's pictures. I am not sure that even a higher place might not be claimed for it. To describe it briefly,—although description carries little true information about such a work,—the composition is very simple and dignified. A sloping piece of ground with a dark grove of trees on the right, enough verdure grows at the left to balance, and the dark mass relieves against a filmy drift of unformed cirrus cloud, behind which and filling the upper left-hand corner the blue, distant sky is seen. Almost in the center of the canvas is an indeterminate, glowing spot, while from the right, leading into the picture and against the dark group of trees an irregular mass of luminous color fills the space. This is all, but as an ensemble of color Blakelock has done nothing finer. The painting of the foreground, the splendid velvety depth of his shadowed trees, is achieved without heaviness or blackness, and the entire earth theme revealed against a sky of incompar-

PEGASUS

PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR

9 inches high, 12¾ inches wide.

INDIAN CAMP

IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the right. 10 inches high, 14 inches wide.

PEGASUS

PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR

[illegible] inches high. [illegible] inches wide.

INDIAN CAMP

IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the right. 16 inches high, 24 inches wide.

able beauty. The film of white cloud is both luminous and elusive, a veritable vapor of light, throbbing, and trembling. Here is no paint, but light itself. How it has been done we may not know, but there is no paint, only lovely pearly light, and the blue, far lakes of the sky. The thing is a dream and as a dream the central glowing note engages our attention.

Upon very intent inspection one discovers that there is the suggestion of a mother and child, a mere suggestion, as if the painter were feeling his way in the matter of form. The interest of this little group both in pose and line of direction seems to be addressed to the moving mass of figures beyond, figures evidently, but very faintly suggested. Enough is shown to lead one to feel the presence of a sort of processional, a vague vision of life,—His life perhaps, since the mother and child have a Madonna-like pose and character,—here revealed to Him, the Child, and this is presented to us in tentative form, timidly even, as if the artist's hand halting in the presence of so great a theme, dared not reveal all of his own vision. The dream, the vision is all there for us, however, if our eyes are not darkened to all imagination, and the setting is superb. I do not know that we should be sorry for its incompleteness, more might have shocked the senses, and the rare genius of the painter knew when to stay his hand. "A Vision of Life" seems a fairer title than "The Ghost Dance".

The suggestive incompleteness of this canvas leads me to speak of another which to a very rare degree

has the quality of perfect completion,—the "Moonlight" recently sold at the Wm. T. Evans' sale. Mr. Evans has ever been a great admirer of Mr. Blakelock and has given several fine examples of his work to the National Gallery at Washington, but not until the dispersal of his entire collection could he bring himself to part with this superb Moonlight. The picture has for years been well known and a valued work both by the public and by the artists. In the profession it has been called a perfect moonlight, and, it has no enemies,—a strange thing, indeed, as painters have strong prejudices. Its beauty depends quite entirely upon the sky,—there is little else. Slight trees above the earth line, a very low horizon or sky-line, and the mysterious glint of water somewhere out there among the shadows, but the great sky soars up from horizon to zenith, arching overhead superbly, and baffling all search in its gradations; the moon hangs low and fills the air with light, a faint haze surrounds it, almost a halo, and the light is that mysterious mingling of opaline colors merging into pale greens and blues, splendidly assembled, and performing their work of gradation quite perfectly.

Authors and critics have an easy way of writing things about pictures which mean little, rhapsodising sometimes and condemning at others, and always building up meanings for the reader's pleasure. Isn't it enough, perhaps, to say that a man's vision has been handed on to us by processes of perfect craft so that we are aware,—completely so,—of its beauty

MOONLIGHT

COLLECTION OF EX-SENATOR WM. A. CLARK

Canvas. 27 inches high, 37 inches wide.

and haunting charm? This Mr. Blakelock has succeeded in doing in this "Moonlight," and the music of it does not leave us, nor its loveliness fade.

The picture was bought by ex-Senator Clark, the price marking a record for Mr. Blakelock's work in the picture world. Regret that the artist can not know of the great price his picture brought is unnecessary. A painter's joy in his art does not arise from knowledge of money values, but from the work itself, and we may imagine Blakelock knew this joy as the serene completeness of his canvas reached its height.

He could not know, as we now do, that this work alone would assure him the honor and loving appreciation of a people.

I am disposed just here to partially contradict myself in my statement that painters work for the joy of the work alone,—there is, perhaps, this thing added,—a great wish for the commendation of the artists themselves.

I remember an incident which quite pathetically verifies this:—At a banquet, the guests being nearly all artists, I sat next a very distinuished painter, a man well on in years, and one who leads a quiet, retired life devoted wholly to art. I ventured to speak of my admiration for his pictures. He thanked me with a gentle sadness, adding, "But artists generally do not care for my pictures." There had recently been held at the Lotos Club an exhibition of selected American pictures. I turned to several painters at

the tables and asked, "What picture at the Lotos was admired most by the artists?" The answer was quick and indicated the painting of my companion. His eyes filled with tears,—"Boys," he said, "that's the best thing I've ever had said to me."

PART FIVE

TWO phases of nature appealed specially to Blakelock. Moonlight and that strange, wonderful moment when night is about to assume full sway, when the light in the western sky lingers lovingly, glowingly, for a space, and the trees trace themselves in giant patterns of lace against the light. All the earth is dim, almost lost in the shadows, and the exquisite drawing of limb and leaf makes noble design, design so subtle as to bring despair, almost, to an artist's soul. This was Blakelock's moment, and it took such hold upon him that his vision translated it into all his work.

The daylight things are permeated with this lovely mystery, and he silhouettes his trees with beautiful drawing against silver gray and golden skies illumined with splendid daylight.

At times he can break away, as in the glowing, "Indian Encampment" at the Metropolitan Museum, in which he reveals the earth and trees with a completeness of vision and fidelity of form quite Rousseau-like in solidity and truth.

Few of us probably realize the rare beauty of this work, and in the haste with which we try to be mod-

ern, we do not pause long enough to study the purity, the vibrant swimming light and air reached in this canvas. No tricks of dots placed in juxtaposition—no decomposition of the spectrum, no giving up of form for the sake of a dazzled eye, but a clear and firmly designed work, with style and mass in its contours —with a noble sky, tremulous with light and perfectly adjusted to the forms below in line and balance; in gradation all that it should be. The phrase "Rousseau-like" is amply justified. It is one of the fine canvases of the Museum, as, certainly, we must so consider that other Blakelock, "The Pipe Dance."

I do not find, "The Pipe Dance" so complete as the "Indian Encampment"—complete in the sense of detail or elaboration of form; it is rather the outpouring of an emotion. The painter has not troubled to elaborate the great trees which lift themselves against the sky in stately perspective. His figures are not well drawn, he has not seemed to care, as, for instance, he did in the little, "Nature's Mirror" figure; but he has contrived to secure the sense of that strange, rhythmic motion, the recurrent cadence of the sound, and the barbaric spirit of the scene. These to him were more desirable qualities than academic exactness. We are no longer in the Museum looking at pictures, but somewhere the great wood has opened and let us in,—in upon a clearing where the sound is weird and the color wild—the song of birds is hushed, and civilization silenced—aboriginal man performs his rites, and the watchful spirit of the artist seizes and gives to

us the tragic mystery. Could we ask him to do more?

There are also those canvases where he sought great glory of color, usually sunset themes with the world involved in a golden red haze. In these works he could combine much of that dignity which mystery gives.

Any one who has seen the "Seal Rocks" now in Chicago must feel the mystery and see the splendor of his effort, and the weird, lonely rock, peopled for the moment with seals,—strange creatures of the sea—is impressive indeed. If we are moved to think of Turner, it is only because we shall never more be able to see the sun descend through a golden haze without such thought, and this, in a way, but pays a subtle compliment to Blakelock.

There is a current opinion that Blakelock signed his pictures, all of them, with his full name enclosed in an outlined arrow-head. I do not find this to be true, for many of his very noble works are not signed at all. So current is this arrow-head notion that the forgers of his pictures, of whom there are many, glibly enclose the signature on their monstrous perpetrations with an arrow-head. Therefore, in a general way, its presence may be good cause for caution.

It is a very dreadful thing that we must submit to the manufacture of these and other pictures, and that there is no law to protect a man and his work. Proceeding on a theory, suggested in the earlier part of this essay, these forgers produce, by heavy bitumen glazes over rich undertones, pictures that readily pass

AT NATURE'S MIRROR

THE NATIONAL GALLERY, WASHINGTON

EVANS COLLECTION

Canvas. Signed at the right. 16 inches high, 23¾ inches wide.

THE CAPTIVE

MUSEUM OF THE BROOKLYN INSTITUTE

Canvas. Signed at the right. 16 inches high, 24 inches wide.

AT NATURE'S MIRROR

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THE CAPTIVE

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Canvas. Signed at the right. 16 inches high, 24 inches wide.

the scrutiny of the untrained and unsuspecting buy-er. The satire of it does not seem to make any difference, and the public absorbs all that appear. The "Oh! well, it does not hurt any one except those who buy the miserable things!" is neither fair nor true. It hurts the artist's reputation, it hurts in the proper understanding of his art and his purposes.

PART SIX

MR. BLAKELOCK had a large family, nine children in all, eight of whom are still living. The maintenance of this family, even though he was ably seconded by his wife, was a heavy burden, and, being a dreamer, he was not always wise in the use of the moneys which came into his possession. The old story of an artist being in difficulty about money matters was often repeated in his experience, and his actions at such times of stress were as unwise as they were hurtful to his progress.

There was an old curiosity shop on Third Avenue many years ago, in which I saw one day many panels and pictures by Blakelock. The proprietor, a man known to many artists when in difficulty, told me there were thirty-three of them, and remarked calmly, "I paid one hundred dollars for them all!"

Blakelock had several friends who helped him when in these times of trial. Mr. Harry W. Watrous was one of these, and in the old Sherwood Building, having adjoining studios, he came to know Blakelock

well. He tells many stories of him and his peculiarities; also, he was often appealed to for aid. He tells of one of these appeals:—"Blakelock came into my studio and asked for a loan. I had only a day or so before let him have fifty dollars, and I refused this last request, saying,—'I can't do it, Blakelock,—what did you do with the fifty I let you have two days ago?' 'Well,' he said, 'A new baby came to us yesterday and money goes fast at such times.' 'Yes,' I said, 'But you already had a big family to support and now this one! How many have you now with this new one?' 'Eight, Watrous, eight—I just had to have an octave.'"

There is another story which Mr. Watrous tells, and this is indicative, also, of the whimsical, strange painter. Watrous had been annoyed all day by a queer, tinkling, weird sort of music, the sound of which came jerkily, but incessantly, from Blakelock's studio. Unable to endure it longer, he went into the studio and found Blakelock alternately rushing from his easel to the piano, playing a few notes of this fantastic air, and back again to the easel, painting a few hasty touches. The picture was an "Indian Dance"—"I can't make these Indians dance, Watrous; all day I've been trying and they won't dance!" And off he would go to the piano and bang out the notes which haunted him from some incident in Indian life. Which shows that he was an impressionist of the better sort, wishing more the idea of motion, than drawing or color or other questions of craft. These probably did not bother him; and while these painter-like qualities may not

have troubled him, because he could compel the material to respond to his will, [illegible] always that in his work which impels emotion.

Ease of execution is not present: one is conscious that it should be, but the difficulty, the labor, must never be seen. We have no business to inform the taste of the observer by the evidence of either struggle or incompetence, and for the man who obscures the beauty of their theme by the [illegible] of the pencil grant, we have no patience. To show the observer [illegible], quite [illegible]; "learn your business before you ask my attention."

I do not think [illegible] by the [illegible] [illegible] that he was [illegible] [illegible] splendor which great colorists reveal, as the glow of rich contrast, the color marshalled hue upon hue until perfect tone is reached. Inness could do this— Titian, of course. Why are never used such a thing? Monticelli, yes, but always at the expense of form. We have grown into the habit of calling certain painters colorists who pass, and can only paint surely in the limited scale of dull gray or brown, and, with delicate tone, produce a harmony. I [illegible] the position of such title. Inness has hit on a splendid phrase: "The fullness of tone can only be had by the fullness of color." It thus [illegible] every [illegible] high [illegible]. Whistler [illegible] and Rembrandt well [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible].

First appreciation of Whistler [illegible] him

THE BROOK BY MOONLIGHT

COLLECTION OF CATHOLINA LAMBERT

Canvas. Signed at the left. 80 inches high, 54 inches wide.

have troubled him, because he could compel his material to respond to his will, there is always that in his work which impels criticism.

Ease of execution is not present, nor is it necessary that it should be, but the difficulty, the labor, must never be seen. We have no business to affront the taste of the observer by the evidence of either struggle or incompetence, and for those men who obscure the beauty of their theme by the flaunt of illy placed paint, we have no patience. To them the observer might say, quite justly, learn your business before you ask my attention.

I do not think Blakelock ever affronts us by the obviousness of his struggle. I would not say of him that he was a great colorist, or that he knew the sonorous splendor which great colorists reveal, or the glory of rich contrast, the color marshalled host upon host until perfect tone is reached. Inness could do this,—Titian, of course. Wyant never tried such a thing. Monticelli, yes, but always at the expense of form. We have grown into the habit of calling certain painters colorists, who paint, and can only paint within the limited scale of dull gray or brown, who with delicate tints produce a harmony. I doubt the justice of such title. Inness has left us a splendid phrase,—"The fullness of tone can only be had in the fullness of color." If this dictum be true, very many high reputations fall. Whistler melts before its blast, and Blakelock will not hold the title of colorist.

Final appreciation of Whistler will consider him

chiefly as an exquisite stylist, a man of consummate taste, and having a sensitiveness to tonal gradation little short of the marvelous, but he was never interested in the intensities of color. So, also, Blakelock never reached the color heights, but was masterful in tone of a luminous, tragic sort. At nightfall he sat upon a height, and played upon the deeper organ pipes, and his music is low and very sweet.

It has been said of the Barbizon men,—"They secure their color at the expense of truth, and envelop their foreground in a dark brown shadow; this is false and impairs the beauty of their work." Certainly, if this is true it suggests a limitation. Inness has been called a colorist, and we find him using every inch of his canvas to bring together into harmonious relation wave upon wave of pure color. Blakelock erred in the Barbizon manner and used over-dark masses of foreground to lend color and light to other portions of his pictures. A weakness, perhaps, but with excellent precedent to support it. When we look upon the exquisite tracery of his black trees against divine skies, we may forgive him much, and love intensely his vision of the nightfall hour.

PART SEVEN

AMONG his great moonlights there are three which, I think, take first place. Of one I have already spoken, the "Moonlight" from the Evans' collection. Another in the possession of Mr. Frederic Fairchild Sherman has the finest qualities of Blake-

lock's palette. It is very sumptuous, though reserved in color. The composition is slight—we have said that he cared little for linear composition—a dimly dark stretch of earth serves for foreground, a tree rises on the right, and there is a hint of water in the middle distance. Over this rises the sky—one of those lovely, broken, flocculent skies, not the unpoetically called mackerel sky, but cirrus, close woven and yet open, with depths behind, and lit by a greenish moon; there is also a faintly seen halo of iridescent tones. The picture has nothing to do with fact. It is a dream of the night; the painter's mood is melancholy, his heart is heavy and he looks into the far sky spaces with sadness. Yet the picture is not wholly sad—there is promise, hope even, and music. No moonlight sonata could more perfectly convey the shadowed mystery of the night, or suggest the witchery of fairy presence. The picture, then, seems peculiarly to belong to Blakelock's most intimate expression, to be verily part of himself, and being so, takes a high place in his art.

The third of these great moonlight pictures is the noble canvas in the collection of Mr. Catholina Lambert of Paterson, New Jersey. The picture is painted on an upright canvas. The composition would give joy to a Japanese. It is definitely a design,—a thing rare in our art,—and depending for its balance upon the flat silhouette of a tree which fills the upper half of the canvas. Smaller darks reach from the ground at the lower left, dim trees and a moonlit waterfall are

placed in the center. This waterfall gives the title to the picture, "Brook by Moonlight." The wonder of the work, from a craftsman's point of view, is the placing of the moon which is directly behind, and seen through the great tree,—doubtless an oak. This tree is pure lace work, full of drawing, lovely, character-ful drawing, and by what mystery of color he has in-duced the white moon to retreat into space, amid all the black lace, one may not divine. It does it, how-ever, and proceeds to fill the little valley and its broken stream with a moonlight as soft, as elusive as music. Had the picture been called, "The Music of Moon-light," the title would have been justified.

How simple are the means, how few the colors, and yet the whole is pervaded with an iridescence like unto but one thing,—moonlight itself!

A variant of the Lambert picture was in the collec-tion of the late Mr. Wm. M. Laffan. The composition was quite the same, but in this canvas the labor is felt if not seen; it lacks the suave certainty of the other, and against it the charge of blackness might well be brought. I do not think the picture is "growing black"; it probably was so, and Mr. Blakelock essayed another canvas for that very reason, and certainly in the last —the Lambert picture—reached a height only fore-shadowed in that of the Laffan collection.

In describing these three pictures one does not wish to ignore the many smaller canvases which are scat-tered through the collections of the land, many of them quite as exquisite as these, but lacking the im-

MOONLIGHT

COLLECTION OF FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN

Canvas. Signed at the right. 22 inches high, 27 inches wide.

portance. Yet I would not seem to say that size has anything to do with the importance of a work of art.

A small moonlight in the collection of Dr. Alexander C. Humphreys has great charm. The picture is called, "Early Evening" and shows Blakelock once again wrestling with the same theme which interested him at all times, and which he never seemed to express to his final satisfaction. He uses the same compositional means,—dark earth near by,—a pool of water, the trees small and scattered, and the moon seen at the full, hung low in the sky, quite at the center of the canvas; but in this picture he seems to search for that high note which delicate, pale-green tones give, and these feel their way through fields of silver, glinting, trembling and altogether beautiful. One almost feels that it is an axiom that Blakelock is at his finest in silver, greens and pale blues. With them he plays up and down the scale, and sounds all the mystic wells of light.

When we look upon such a sky, and feel the perfection of its atmosphere and light, we wonder why it was necessary for so called Impressionism to be born, when light, if secured at all, is secured at the cost of loveliness in other ways.

In all of Mr. Blakelock's pictures, we may read that strain which continued to the end of his working days—the strain of melancholy. It is felt in the heaviness of much of his composition, the depth and somber quality of his shadows, and the silence of his line. The sun seldom bursts upon the earth in a golden

smile, there is never the flicker and sparkle of light upon young growths, the very streams flow slowly and sadly down to the sea, and the moonlight, if it falls upon a fairyland, like Keats's, it is a "fairyland forlorn." These very qualities reveal the intense love of the man for his art.

Within his soul is a joy so intense, there is no room for jest or laughter, nor need for either. His is a shadowed figure in the world of our art.

PART EIGHT

LONG ago I saw him pass through the National Academy during an Annual Exhibition. He was at that time slight of figure, a little stooped, thin and very sad of face, the gloom of melancholy already upon it, the hair brushed back from a high, white forehead was long and curly at the ends, falling quite to the shoulders. What he bore in his mind, what he thought of the pictures shown there, we may not know. He was in, not of the life or the art.

Within the present year, the National Academy of Design has reminded herself of his merit and elected him an Associate member of that body. That he will attain to full membership is undoubted, for there will be many to meet, eagerly, the requirements of the Academy's rule concerning such elections. He will not know of this tribute by the artists, the veil which has fallen over his mind can not be pierced, but the Academy in honoring him, honors herself and pre-

serves in her great roll of Americans a very shining name. Mr. Arthur Hoeber has told in the "Literary Miscellany," the story of the final blow which stilled his brush and silenced forever the flow of beauty from him to us:—

"In need for the necessities of life, he went to a man to whom he had sold pictures before—always at an absurdly low price. To him he offered one of his masterpieces, and for it this person offered a sum so low as to stagger even Blakelock who was not unaccustomed to starvation figures, and he recoiled from the offer, returning home to find in the end he must take it. So back he went, but the man, discovering his pressing needs, now offered even a lower figure, and again Blakelock left. A third visit resulted in a further reduction, but the dazed artist was obliged to accept. A short while afterwards he was found outside the office tearing up the paper money, quite out of his mind, one of the most pathetic figures in the annals of art."

Sad enough it is, full of tragedy, and with a piercing criticism of the public in its attitude toward art. That Mr. Blakelock had endured all the strain possible and merely broke down at this point is all we need to know. On September 12, 1899, it became necessary to remove him from his home to that haven where he still lives, shattered in mind and blind to those impulses which swayed his life. On that very day his youngest child was born!

The cycle of strain is over, the golden brush is

dull,—in the thoughtful places of men's hearts he has high and distinguished consideration, but to the outer, larger, more casual world he is not yet known. From dim, forgotten places, in the future years, other generations will find and bring to light his quiet, glowing jewels of color and tone, precious as jewels must ever be, whether they be from the mines of the Lord, or from the deep places of the human heart.

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